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ABSTRACT

Within each speech communication class, the teacher can more easily realize the overriding goals of general education by expanding the horizons of the assignment using the method of forced choice. Forced choice operates within the assumptions that the spectrum of structure helps reach a more thorough set of educational goals, and giving the student choices provides a greater motivation for learning. The basic operating principle of forced choice is: while the teacher defines the parameters of the assignment, the student is faced with several choices as to how the assignment will be developed. Teachers can create choices for a single aspect of a speech, or create choices among a field of items as a way to teach the components of that field. Some teachers create choices out of their own educational interests. Another way to give students choices is to allow them to select the method in which they will present the information they have learned. Like all aspects of the management of a communication environment, the teacher needs to communicate clearly the nature of the choices and the freedom necessary to make choices. (RS)

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CREATIVITY: FORCED CHOICE AS FREEDOM TO LEARN MORE

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Creativity: Forced Choice as Freedom to Learn More

The Yin/Yang symbol represents for many teachers the duality and opposition represented by freedom for creativity and structure necessary to achieve certain learnings. Yet, just as the two sides oppose each other, they also together create a balance for the whole. Within that paradox of balance and conflict one of the first presuppositions that I developed as a teacher was that forced choice often led to more creativity than lack of structure. Thus, this paper outlines the concept and practice of forced choice as a way to achieve creativity. The context for this thesis is that within each speech communication class, the teacher can more easily realize the over-riding goals of general education by using this method of forced choice by expanding the horizons of the assignment.

Forced choice operates within the assumptions that a) the spectrum of structure helps reach a more thorough set of educational goals, and b) that by giving the student choices, a greater motivation for learning occurs. Each of these depend upon the teacher communicating an enthusiasm and understanding of the purposes of such structure and choices. The benefit for the teacher occurs by reaching the educational goals of the class while giving the students a chance to pursue their interests, experience, and values. The learning assumption is that students learn best those ideas in which they have an interest.

The Teacher's Context For Planning

Each teacher creates a philosophy of teaching by her choices of activities. Several assumptions underlie the oxymoron of forced choice:

a) One never teaches just one goal with an assignment,

b) The subject matter of each course is linked to the reality of each student's general education,

c) Students appreciate demanding teachers more than lax teachers, and

d) Both content and process goals operate in each assignment, so that both set up a sequence of learning within both the course and one's educational sequence.

The basic operating principle of forced choice is: <u>While the teacher defines the parameters of the assignment, the student is faced with several choices as to how the assignment will be developed.</u> Thus, the first step is to plan what learning goal the teacher desires and then calculate what options might be possible. (for purposes of illustration, I will use a variety of assignments from the basic public speaking class). To make this initial planning decision, at least three levels of sequencing are operating:

a) where the assignment fits in the course,

b) where the course fits in the program, and

c) where the program fits within the educational unit.

To illustrate, when I decide what the initial speaking assignment is, these questions come to bear on my selection:

a) As the first assignment in class what do I want students to experience?

b) As the students only speech communication course as part of the English sequence, what language arts goals might be operating?

c) As part of the high school program, what general high school goals might influence my assignment?

My answers might be: a) to have them experience standing in front of the class giving a short presentation that has them understand how a quotation will support an idea and how the speaker needs to look at the audience before starting the speech and after finishing the speech; b) how the language arts goals of exposing students to the rhetorical principle of supporting ideas with evidence is present in both writing and speaking; and c) students need to learn about other cultures.

Given these goals, I would now ask, how am going to create choice for the students? Since the rhetorical goals are clearly established for the course sequence, the options can come from the quotations selected by the students, which I might choose to limit in a way to reach the generalized high school mission (goal) of exposure to other cultures. Several choice areas might be:

a) a quotation from a famous person of another culture,

b) a quotation from a student of another culture at the high school, or

c) a quotation about a religious practice of another culture.

Another option might be to decide that just standing in front of

the class is enough of a burden, so that no restrictions are placed on the student. Yet, for many students some structure is a better option in helping them limit the burden of choice. If that is decided, then the teacher in working back down the goals might decide:

a) that one of the language arts goals of exposing students to a variety of sources from newspapers to interviews might lead to a quotation from a newspaper (or a more limited choice, one of the reputable newspapers subscribed to by the high school and/or local library (New York Times, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, Portland Oregonian--or other statewide newspaper), or

b) that one of the class goals would be appropriate, so that a quotation from the textbook from the class would be appropriate as a way to reward them at the beginning of the class for reading some of the initial chapters.

Thus, the teacher has created choice for one of aspect of this beginning speech--the type of supporting materials.

Multiple Choices for Creativity: While the above illustration is how to create choices for a single aspect of the speech, the teacher may want to create choices among a field of items as a way to teach the components of that field. If part of the school's goals are to teach students about community, then the teacher may want to structure a speech around levels of community. The informative speech might be on any topic (choice one) in one of the levels of community (choice two). The teacher presents the levels

of community as:

a) family as the central community,

b) the neighborhood as a face-to-face community,

c) the town/city as a local political unit,

d) the country/nation as dominant political community, and

e) the world as the community of all nations.

Thus, as various students make their choices about level, the students are exposed to the levels of community. Since it is possible that the responses of the students might not include one and even two options, the teacher still gains by the defining of the choices and the post-analysis of the choices. One can have the class master(s) of ceremonies (a common practice in public speaking classes to give students additional speaking time and training by introducing the speakers--set up so as to rotate through the semester, giving each student a chance to be m.c.) keep track of the topics in relationship to the levels and report on that after the last speech.

Personal Goals for Spurring Creativity. Some teachers create choices out of their own educational interests. While my own experience as a Peace Corps Volunteer, might lead to a sensitivity to international topics, each teacher should look at her own interests as a possible source of choices. A teacher might decide that students need to know more about female leaders, so that a round of informative speeches might require the students to select a female leader. Situations, like this topic on female leaders,

which often push students to seek out people not known to them, might be aided by topic recommendations worked up with the help of the librarian. Thus, a list of biographies of female leaders might be prepared by the teacher and/or librarian for use in the class. If resources are not plentiful, the teacher might expand it to leaders in general and still hand out a list of female leaders. Or the teacher might narrow the topic down to female orators as a way of instructing the class on the wide number of female orators while reinforcing the speech communication class goal of information about the practice of speaking in communities.

Work Related Options As Creative Choices. Exposure to the world of work is often a goal of the educational institution, so that the teacher might have class goals of teaching students to a) learn from interviews--a language arts goal, and b) learn about a variety of jobs--a school related goal. The students might be assigned to interview 3 people in a specific occupation in which they might be interested in pursuing to provide background information about the job--duties, education required, problems associated with the job, benefits associated with it. Often a common core set of questions creates a base for informing the class about the different occupations, while each student is expected to go beyond that base as a part of audience analysis to create variety among the presentations.

Choice of Oral Methodology. Another way to give students choice is to allow them to select the method in which they will present the information they have learned. Given the same

assignment goals as above the teacher might outline the following options:

a) a 5-7 minutes speech by an individual on a career,

b) a symposium by 3-6 students on a specific career area,

c) a panel discussion of a career choice,

d) a group making a video of some of the interviews that were made while gathering the information, or

e) a narrated slide show of various aspects of the job.

With each option the teacher might have a single page hand-out that specifies the topic, time, and individual requirements for the method, as well as how it might be graded. With each option the student invests a motivation for BOTH the methodology and the career area. Time must be given in class to allow the choices to appear. For example, the teacher might have a student lead the discussion of various career choices, so that some procedures in group decision making can happen in class, i.e., the student puts on the board various careers that people might have interests in, so that a student might change report topic in order to pursue a particular methodology.

Another approach to this area is to have a symposium on evaluating different ways to obtain information via listening and observing. The students then choose among the following topics which a teacher would want to cover: a) the public speech, b) the talk-show, c) the documentary, d) the panel discussion on radio/television, and e) the news program. While the student is selecting the format for investigation, the teacher prepares what

she wants covered for each format. She might structure the following basics for each topic with the suggestion that the students CREATIVELY FIGURE OUT A WAY TO PRESENT THE INFORMATION:

a) How is the main theme presented in its verbal and nonverbal aspects?

b) How are the listeners/observers kept focused on the topic?

c) In what ways are the themes developed?

d) How are arguments developed and supported? and

e) How is the presentation organized to give emphasis to what ideas?

Within each assignment both structure and choice is emphasized.

The Teacher's Communication of Choice

Like all aspects of the management of a communication environment the teacher needs to communicate clearly the nature of the choices and the freedom necessary to make choices. For example, if the teacher's goal is an informative speech on the history of the town and the student is to use information from newspaper accounts prior to 1940, she needs to communicate that a variety of topics are encouraged. Have students find out what sports were reported on?, what hair styles are indicated via the advertisements?, what social events were covered?, what churches got news coverage?, what were the political issues?, what were the costs of food? The key is to push the students beyond the normal expectations, so that they can relate daily aspects of their lives to the assignment--within that response a creativity will occur

that goes beyond what currently is the run-of-the-mill.

The communication of choice is enhanced by the teacher's own creativity in being able to share with students a wide variety of choices available and a willingness to allow a wide range of topics. She not only helps the students by suggestions for choice, but by also allowing a discussion so that students feel free to make suggestions (helps to tolerate crazy, attention-getting ideas designed to produce laughs rather than viable topics). As the semester precedes students will understand the freedom being given, so that for some students more and more effort will be made to do what is interesting for them. As students observe other students being creative, a model will be there to communicate indirectly that creativity in this class is welcome.

Let us remember that one of the objectives of "America 2000" in Goal Three is:

> "The percentage of students who demonstrate the ability to reason, solve problems, apply knowledge, and write and communicate effectively will increase substantially."

To help increase that number of students speech communication teachers can help creativity by structuring choices in assignments as a way of allowing freedom to learn more.